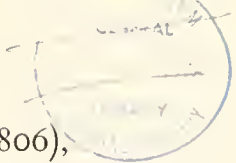


EDWARD WHITAKER GRAY (1748-1806),
KEEPER OF NATURAL CURIOSITIES
AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM



BY
ALBERT E. GUNTHER

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By A. E. GUNTHER

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INTRODUCTION

EDWARD WHITAKER GRAY (1748-1806) was the great-uncle of John Edward Gray (1800-1875), the outstanding Keeper of the Natural History Collections at the British Museum; in fact J. E. Gray achieved the position over thirty years after his uncle's death.¹ The uncle's life is of interest to us because it was part of the tradition absorbed by John Edward from scraps of hearsay remembered from his parents. Although the outline of Edward Whitaker's career is documented, far less is known about the man himself than about his great-nephew. Knowledge of a doctor, naturalist and administrator of only moderate distinction such as Gray, has thus to depend as much on what is known of the men and institutions with whom he came into contact, as on the evidence of documents from his hand.

EARLY YEARS

Edward Whitaker Gray was the second son of Samuel Gray IV (1694-1766), second in the line of Seedsman of the Black Boy, Pall Mall, (who had added to his prevailing seed business the import of plants from Holland). Of his two sons, Samuel Gray V (1735-1771) carried on the business and, being of a studious nature, made a translation of Linnaeus' *Philosophia Botanica*, which likewise became an item in John Edward Gray's familial academic tradition. Samuel's younger brother, Edward Whitaker, thirteen years his junior, chose the medical profession of surgeon and apothecary, and the first we know about him (Gray, J. E., c. 1862-74 : f. 53) is that he attended the anatomical school of Dr William Hunter (1718-1783), elder brother of the more famous John Hunter (1728-1793) who founded the museum at the Royal College of Surgeons.

To join William Hunter's school was the privilege of the well-to-do. A family in the Gray's position, which looked beyond success in trade to a place in society,

¹ E. W. Gray and J. E. Gray were two of six members of the Gray family to be included by G. S. Boulger in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1890, 23 : 7-9.

would want their son to enter a profession. What better than that he should have the advantage of discourses by a leading surgeon, whose declared policy was that instruction in anatomy should be given through dissection, as it was in Paris, and who had established a reputation as much for the clarity of his exposition as for his learning? If Edward Whitaker Gray had started his training at the age of 15 or 16, he would have found William Hunter still lecturing in Lichfield Street, off Cambridge Circus, but planning the erection of a more adequate School of Anatomy to be built in Great Windmill Street, off what was then Piccadilly (now Shaftesbury Avenue), to which he moved in 1767 (Peachey, 1924 : 114). When completed, the plain brick building, which still stands as part of the Lyric Theatre, contained not only all that was needed in the way of an amphitheatre and rooms for lectures and dissections, but also 'a magnificent room fitted up with great elegance and propriety as a museum'. William Hunter, like his brother, formed one of the great collections of the day, not only of anatomical and pathological preparations, but of coins, medals, minerals, shells, corals and other natural history specimens, as well as a library of rare Greek and Latin works, which have been described as they stood in 1783 (Simmons, 1783 : 57-62), and all of which Hunter left to the University of Glasgow (Laskey, 1813). It was against this background of interest and culture, beyond what his training called for, that Gray spent the later years of his medical education and, being an affluent young man, evidently came to see that there were other ways of spending his life than in humdrum medical practice. In the event, he did not spend longer as a surgeon and apothecary than he found convenient. It may be assumed, then, that Hunter's interest and friendship, retained in later life, may have turned Gray's interests towards natural philosophy and kindled a desire to join an institution devoted to it. This eventually led him to seek a niche in the British Museum, the first of seven members of the Gray family in the next 150 years to enter its service.

In 1771, at the age of 23 and having completed his studies, Gray was admitted as a member of the Royal College of Physicians, then in Warwick Lane in the City and, applying for the post of Beadle, was elected on 30 September (Anon., 1781 : 8). Although there is no mention of Librarianship when he 'gave his Faith to the College', exactly a year later we learn that

Mr Gray acquainted the College that all the Books were in the Library (30 September 1772 - Anon., 1781 : 18).

In 1773, however, a Declaration of Trust of 25 June (Anon., 1781 : 30) records that E. W. Gray, of the City of London, Gentleman, was appointed Beadle and Librarian for which he surrendered a bond of £200 in East Indian Annuities in the books of the Government and Company of English Merchants trading in the East Indies. All this tends to show Gray as a young man without the immediate need to earn a living who wished to indulge an interest in books, and who could afford a bond from his own or his parents' pocket. As Librarian it was his duty :

... carefully diligently according to the best of his powers keep and preserve all the books, plate and household stuff belonging to the said [persons representing the President and College].

With the transfer of the securities on 30 June 1773, Gray entered on his duties and resigned as Beadle.

That Gray had, in fact, been engaged in library work since 1771 is suggested from his being paid his salary in August 1773 as 'Librarian and Beadle' for the previous year, an amount of £28. 7. 9.

That same month, on 6 August 1773, he 'attended to be examined as an extra-Licentiate' and, on being approved by the President and three Electors, had 'Letters Testimonial signed and sealed granted to him according to Statute' (Anon., 1781: 30-32). This extra qualification was necessary for a man who wished to practice outside a radius of seven miles from London. If, at the age of 25, Gray already had the intention of applying for a practice abroad this was an essential step.

What drew Gray to Portugal must remain a matter of conjecture. A young surgeon and apothecary who had no need to engage in routine medical practice would seek a position where he could both engage in his profession and pursue his interests in natural history. Where better than in an established institution in a friendly country within some days sailing from Bristol or Falmouth? In the 1770s, ten years after the end of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), English influence in Portugal had never stood higher, or its medicine in greater repute. This was largely due to the year of service William Hunter had given during the war, both with the British army (he opened a military hospital in Lisbon in 1762) and among the Portugese, who, having no medical service of their own, founded a chair of surgery at Lisbon in 1764 and sent their students to William Hunter's school in London, or to Edinburgh, for training. For a medical post in Portugal, therefore, William or John Hunter's name served as a powerful recommendation, for although both were frugal in their habits, John taking no wine, they could hardly have escaped contact with the wealthy in the wine trade.

The English merchants who traded with Oporto had long been favoured by the Portugese Crown with a gift of land on which they had built a Factory House out of their own resources. In addition an Act of Parliament had made it obligatory for them to relieve shipwrecked mariners and distressed British subjects through the support of a hospital and a minister of religion. Of the years between 1773 and 1778 that Gray spent at Oporto, at the Factory House as surgeon at its hospital, next to nothing is known since its archives do not extend back beyond 1812 (Anon., 1975).

Late in 1773, or in 1774, Gray wrote to Mr Joseph Banks, as he was then, that he was leaving for Oporto and he enquired whether there was any service he could perform (Gray, E. W., 1773). All that is known of the sequel is that in 1777, the year before Gray's return to England, Banks was sent a collection of plants (Britten & Boulger, 1931). Otherwise the record of Gray's doings is limited to the little John Edward Gray was told, namely that his uncle had returned from Portugal with a 'collection of Natural Productions of that country' (*Dict. natn. biogr.* 1890, 23: 7), and particularly of amphibia - a reference J. E. Gray may have culled from a letter Johann Fabricius (1745-1808) of Kiel wrote from London during a visit in 1782 (Fabricius, 1784). But in John Edward's eyes, all that he had heard about his

uncle fully justified his appointment to the British Museum at Montagu House as a logical sequence in his career as a naturalist.

A year or so after reaching Oporto Gray married Elizabeth Beazeley and had two daughters there, and a son after his return to England.² But it was J. E. Gray's opinion that marriage did not suit his great-uncle, who went so far as to dissuade his nephew, Samuel Frederick, from marrying on pain of losing the job he held at the time with Dr Robert Nares (1753-1829), philologist and editor; being a man with a mind of his own, lose his job Samuel Frederick did (Gray, J. E., *c.* 1862: f. 3).

In 1778, after four years at the Factory House, Gray evidently decided not to return to Portugal, and looked around for occupation. Since his name was not in the *Medical Register* for 1779 (the first issue), medicine may have been closed to him, but it appears in the 1780 and 1783 issues, but not again. In the last, he is entered as residing at the British Museum and as a F.R.S., but also as Treasurer and Secretary of the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge. This Society was established in 1780 for the purpose of reading papers and to dine once a quarter at the Old Slaughter's Coffee-House, but it did not have a long life, and nothing more is heard of Gray's activities in it.

In this period Gray also became a member of a Philosophical Society which was active from about 1780 and was named only after the coffee-houses in which it met, such as The Chapter, The Baptist's Head, or at the house of Adam Walker, Hanover Square, one of the members, but their number did not include men of distinction like the Hunters or Sir Joseph Banks. The Society does not seem to have existed after 1788. From about 1780, then, one must assume that Gray's work at the British Museum filled his time and that he therefore dropped out of medical and philosophical circles. (Musson & Robinson, 1969; Gunther, R. T. 1936.)

BRITISH MUSEUM

Of Gray's appointment to the British Museum at Montagu House nothing more is known than what J. E. Gray records, that the appointment was made on the recommendation of Dr William Hunter (Gray, J. E., *c.* 1862-74: f. 53). If Gray was fortunate in securing such a niche, he was even more so in the sequence of events that, within nine years, brought him the keepership of the natural history collections. Until 1772, the Department of Natural and Artificial Productions, as it was called, had been in the charge of Dr Matthew Maty (1718-1776), a doctor of medicine from Leyden. When made Principal Librarian, Maty was succeeded by Dr Daniel Solander (1736-1782), a Swede, pupil of Linnaeus, botanist, scholar and compiler of catalogues, who in 1768 was given three years' leave of absence to act as scientific companion to Sir Joseph Banks on Captain Cook's first voyage round the world. Being fully occupied on his return, both with Sir Joseph's library and with the botanical collection secured during the voyage (at the expense of his Museum duties), Solander was given two assistants, in 1773, J. O. Justamond,

² Juliana (1775-1837), Elizabeth (1777-?), and Francis Edward (1784-1810); also William Herman (1794 ob. inf.).

son-in-law of Dr Maty, a writer and translator, who was to do literary work for him, and in 1776, the Rev. Paul Henry Maty (1745–1787), Dr Maty's son.³

The younger Maty was one of a Cambridge group who, influenced by doubts during a period of intellectual enlightenment, subscribed in 1772 to a petition which attempted to get Parliament to amend the terms of subscription in the universities from the Thirty Nine Articles to something simpler; being of a cantankerous disposition, he resigned the ecclesiastical office he held at Cambridge and refused to accept another such office elsewhere. It was evidently a case of a temperamental obstinacy finding an outlet for its expression, which not only made for difficulties with Gray in the Museum, but re-emerged in 1784 when he resigned as Senior Secretary of the Royal Society in a dispute with the President. So, with Justamond's dismissal in 1778, and with Gray returned from Portugal and waiting in the wings, the way was open for Gray's appointment under Maty.

In 1782, Solander's premature death, as great a loss to the Museum as to science, left Maty in the Keepership, and with Maty's death in 1787, Gray, at the age of 42, stepped into his shoes.

Gray's nineteen years as Assistant and Keeper of the natural history collections at Montagu House were not marked by any particularly noteworthy event, nor, on his part, by any contribution to science or literature to equal those made by his predecessor, Daniel Solander, nor even by his successor, George Shaw (1751–1813). Nor do the Trustees Minutes do much to make good the general lack of information about progress within the Department. Such information as there is deserves to be put on record, not because it is in itself important, but because it tells us a little more about what sort of a man, and what sort of a naturalist, Gray was.

With Solander as Keeper, whether or not fully attentive to his duties, Antiquities would have been left to Maty, but with Maty's assumption of the Keepership in 1782 there seem to have been differences in the reports submitted by him and by Gray,⁴ although what these differences were the Trustees Minutes do not make clear. At all events we suddenly find Gray engaged in rearranging the Bird Room, his first recorded task, which occupied him for the next two years. This was the first time that an attempt was made to order, according to the Linnean system, the large number of birds added to the collections by gift and by purchase, particularly by Matthew Maty in 1769–70. This earned Gray £50 from the Major Edward's fund⁵ for his extra trouble,⁶ for Gray had been in the Museum for about eighteen months before a new order required Officers 'to arrange the contents of their several departments'; presumably this had previously been left to the Attendants.⁷

In 1784, following what reads as a rather high-handed reply to the Trustees about extra fees, which only a man of private means would have ventured, Gray turned his attention to the Insect Room. The Trustees had ordered

³ *Dict. natn. biogr.*, 1894, 37 : 78 (Maty, P. H., written by T. Seccombe).

⁴ Information cited from the British Museum Trustees Minutes is indicated by footnotes, where GM = General Meetings and C = Committee Meetings, each followed by a Minute number. BM. Trustees Minutes, 1784, GM. 656, 844 *et seq.*

⁵ Major Arthur Edwards made a bequest in support of the Cottonian Library, which was subsequently diverted to more general uses, and Natural History was a frequent beneficiary (Edwards 1870 : 305).

⁶ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1784, C.1859.

⁷ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1802, GM.958.

That during the vacation the maids clean the glass of the several cases in the Natural History and Antiquity Rooms ; and that the contents of those Rooms be also cleaned as far as may be done with safety under the inspection of the Officers of that department.⁸

Further, Gray was to report on the 'cleaning, classing and labelling the contents of the Insect Room' and to advise whether a case could be made for the sale of the duplicates in the 'base story'. In his reply, Gray felt unable to make 'an accurate proposal' unless the Trustees would 'make him an adequate allowance for the trouble' involved and, presumably being assured they would, he spent the next two and a half years in arranging the insects.⁹ For this, in January 1787, he was paid £200, the Trustees acknowledging

... his great care and assiduity and in consideration of the length of time he has given to and the skill with which he has completed the work.¹⁰

In the meantime the duplicates in the 'base story' (a headache to Officers and Trustees alike for as long as Montagu House existed, and for longer even than that) were allowed to remain there until an assistant arrived in the person of Dr George Shaw in 1791, when they became his first assignment.¹¹

There is, during the period of Gray's assistantship, only one record of the opinion of his work outside the Trustee's Minutes, and that comes from a foreign source. It was made during the visit in July 1782 of Dr Johann Christian Fabricius, the Danish entomologist and professor of natural history at Kiel, who was in London calling on such notables as Sir Joseph Banks and William Hunter. In a number of *Briefe aus London* (addressed to friends, unnamed) he mentions Lord Stormont (1727-1796)¹² recommending P. H. Maty, who had been his lordship's chaplain while attached to the French court.

In his [Solander's] place there has been appointed a man of great knowledge in Dr Matty [sic], but in the field of science he is an amateur. Lord Stormont's recommendation overlooked the knowledge of Dr Gray who is really the only person in the Museum who has any idea of natural history, and who would make a claim on Solander's place . . . but things work out in England much as they do in other countries . . .

[Dr Gray] has worked in Amphibia, and though he has many specimens in spirits, there remains much to be done.¹³

With Maty's death early in 1787 and Gray's promotion as Under-Librarian (as Keeper of the Department of Natural and Artificial Products), as well as his appointment as Secretary to the British Museum, together with the papers he was writing

⁸ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1784, C.1873/4.

⁹ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1784, C.1880.

¹⁰ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1787, C.1943.

¹¹ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1791, C.2033, 2044.

¹² *Buyke's Peerage*, 1970. Mansfield and Mansfield. David, 7th Viscount Stormont and 2nd Earl Mansfield, p. 1748. See also *Dict. natn. biogr.* 1894, 39 : 355 (Murray, David, written by J. M. Rigg).

¹³ Fabricius, 1784 : 80, 81, 122, 123. A free translation. The author was not well informed, and there is no purpose in quoting an inaccurate version.

for the Royal Society's *Transactions*, Gray evidently had little time for working on the collections, and until 1799 the Minutes are silent on this aspect of his duties.¹⁴

Gray, like other senior officers in the Museum, was obliged to give a portion of his time to general administration and one of his tasks was to screen potential readers and to supervise the Reading Room. It was, however, a chance that couples Gray's name with that of Warren Hastings (1732-1818), the Indian administrator who had succeeded Clive as the first Governor-General. In 1798 it was Gray, as Secretary of the British Museum, who signed the acknowledgement on behalf of the Trustees of Hastings' gift to the Library of the 'Debates in the House of Lords on the Trial of Warren Hastings Esq. etc.' and in 1801, as Secretary of the Royal Society, Gray signed the certificate of Hastings' election on 26 June (B.M. MSS. I, 2).

In 1799 two of the most important collections that were to come to the Museum in this period fell to Gray's responsibility: the Hatchett Mineral Collection (Anon., 1904) by purchase out of the Edwards' fund, and the Cracherode collection, by bequest, of books, manuscripts and their first substantial acquisition of shells. Work on the Hatchett Mineral collection (some 7000 specimens purchased for £700) provided the foundation of the Museum's collection and occupied Gray for the best part of three years, for which he was paid the sum of £150 'for his labours as had heretofore been allowed to Officers for similar services'. After that, Gray was authorized to procure the assistance of the Count de Bournon (1751-1825), at the time exiled in London, who worked on them until Gray's demise.¹⁵ The Cracherode shell collection was accompanied by a catalogue made by Mr George Humphrey, the dealer who purchased the shells. This was edited about 1801 by Gray, who added Linnaeus' names from Gmelin's 13th edition of the *Systema Naturae* (1788 or 1789), and for some time it was attributed to Gray in error (Gray, E. W., c. 1801). In 1802 Gray was seeking permission to make changes in the room which was to include fossils and shells.¹⁶

Although from 1791, for the next fourteen years, Gray had the assistance of Dr George Shaw,¹⁷ the records do not bring their names together. Shaw, only three years younger than Gray, was a man of parts, a naturalist by calling who may have found a want of sympathy in his more conventional chief. Trained in Oxford for the church, in Edinburgh for medicine, returning to Oxford to lecture in botany, Shaw later engaged in medical practice in London while collaborating with James Edward Smith and James Sowerby as the zoologist in various joint publications. At Montagu House, desiring to attract an audience to his work, he sought the permission of the Trustees to give lectures in the 'base story', but

. . . the Trustees do not think themselves justified of giving permission for the reading of lectures in the walls of this House.¹⁸

¹⁴ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1787, C.1946.

¹⁵ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1803, C.2233.

¹⁶ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1802, GM.058.

¹⁷ *Dict. natu. biogr.*, 1897, 51 : 436 (Shaw, George, written by B. B. Woodward). See also *Gent. Mag.*, 1813 (2) : 290.

¹⁸ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1795, C.2106.

PLATE 1

Edward Whitaker Gray. Portrait by Sir Augustus Wall Callcott (1779-1844),
presented to the Royal Society by the artist in 1830.



PLATE 2

E. W. Gray. Certificate of Election to the Royal Society, 11 February 1779.

3

Dear my Father & Mother of the
 Royal Museum and Agricultural Association
 I have the honor to certify in all Members of
 Natural History, I am desirous to become
 a Member of the Royal Society, we who
 have the honor to be recommended to you
 and your knowledge recommend me as
 deserving that honor and verily to
 become a valuable Member.

Read Nov. 5. 1770.

- | | |
|-----|---------------|
| 1. | 12 |
| 2. | 19 |
| 3. | 26 |
| 4. | Dec. 10 |
| 5. | 17 |
| 6. | 24 |
| 7. | Jan. 4. 1771. |
| 8. | 21 |
| 9. | 28 |
| 10. | Feb. 4 |
- Butler had for & Colled
 Feb. 11. 1771.

Mr. Bunker

J. Harper

B. Wilson

W. Watson

Jan. 10. 1771.

mat. Duane

J. A. Majordie

Hay

Sam. Madwell

Crowley

Chas. Minton

PLATE 3

E. W. Gray Handwriting and signature. Letter to Sir Joseph Banks,
3 September 1802 (B.M. Add. MS 33018, f. 59)

Dear Sir

59

My endeavours to ascertain (by searching the books at Somerset Place) whether the Croonian Lecture can be read by any but a Fellow of the Society, have been fruitless: it does not appear that there exists any extract of the Will or other document by which the Question can be determined. It is however very clear, that neither the Croonian nor the Bakerian Lecture have yet been read by Persons who were not Fellows of the Society; and there is an extract from Baker's Will, which states positively that the Lecturer must be a fellow of the Society. To argue from analogy therefore, we must suppose the case the same with respect to the Croonian Lecture, which is the more unlucky as my friend Mr. Pearson would willingly have undertaken the task of supplying one. I have however the promise of a Bakerian Lecture from Dr. Wollaston, so that we shall at least have something to begin with.

I have looked over the Paper ^{on Optics} sent to Mr. Plancha from Italy, and am convinced it is not worth meddling with, unless in a case of absolute necessity, to which I hope we shall not be driven: besides other objections, the author expects the Society will repeat his ill contrived experiments, and send him their opinion of them.

Upon the whole, I fear we must give up the Idea of a Croonian Lecture, but if you think it not too late to make any further attempts for me, you will be so good as to let me know.

I am very truly your most obed^t serv^t
B. W. Green

British Museum
Oct. 3, 1802.

Oct 7 - 12

PLATE 4

E. W. Gray. Elected as Trustee to the Hunterian Collection.
Records, **1**. 4 (at the Royal College of Surgeons, London).

List of Trustees, 1st April 1802

By Office

- (5)
- The Lord Chancellor
 - The first Lord of the Treasury.
 - The Chancellor of the Exchequer.
 - The first Lord of the Admiralty.
 - The Speaker of the House of Commons.
 - The Secretary at War.
 - The President of the Royal Society.
 - The President of the College of Physicians
 - The four Censors of the College of Physicians
 - The Professor of Physic in the University of Oxford.
 - The Reader in Anatomy in the University of Oxford
 - The Regius Professor of Physic in the University of Cambridge.
 - The Professor of Anatomy in the University of Cambridge.

By Appointment.

- Lord Auckland.
- Lord Darton
- Charles Small Poyser Esq^r
- George Rose Esq^r
- Matthew Baillie M. D.
- Lord Saint Helens.
- Lord Aiden.
- Sir Charles Blagden.
- Isaac Hawkins Brown Esq^r
- Sir Archibald Macdonald.
- The Bishop of Landaff.
- Edward Whitaker Gray Esq^r
- Charles Long Esq^r
- Sir G. Muckburgh Esq^r Bart

By Election.

PLATE 5

John Edward Gray on E. W. Gray. *Miscellaneous Papers*, 1862-74 folio 53.
British Museum (Natural History).

Edward Whistaker Gray esq.
 The eldest son of Samuel Gray of Pallmal was
 born the 21 of March 1748. he was educated
 in London studying medicine under Dr William
 Hunter the exact Prachis medicine in
 sports and on his return to this country
 with a collection of ^{the} Natural history of
 that country, which he presented to Dr Hunter
 he was appointed chiefly by the interest
 of ^{Dr William Hunter} that eminent ~~man~~ as an assistant
 Librarian having charge of the Natural
 History collection in the British Museum

Fabricius
 letters.

Baylor Record
 4 206 Moore
 x A Hunt Seal
 Duffield

see Index Fabricius 1778. On the 11 of Feb 1779 he was elected
 Fellow of the Royal Society, in 1787. he
 was promoted to Keeper of the Natural History collection
 and Secretary to the British Museum
 and on the 30 of Nov. 1797 was elected

see Index Fabricius 1778.
 80-122
 Dr Kirby appointed
 before him
 when he was 1797

The senior
 1st. secretary of the Royal Society
 he retained these three offices until
 his death on the 27 of December 1806
 he was succeeded as Secretary of the
 Royal Society by Sir Humphrey Davy,
 the publisher two papers in the Transactions
 entitled.

add.

~~He had a son~~ - He married in sports
 Miss Beasley, and had ^{four} ~~three~~ children a son
 who died before her a two daughters the one of his daughters
 after her mother married, Mr Taylor became the
 first keeper of the Antiquarian Department
 in the British Museum and for some years
 Secretary of the Royal Society. Another from 18. to 16

Battle of the Nile in 1798, was the capture from the French at Alexandria of the Egyptian antiquities (including the Rosetta Stone) which reached England in 1802/3 and were stored in sheds in the garden of Montagu House. The second was the purchase in 1804 of the Townley Collection, the finest collection in England at the time of classical sculpture, coins, medals and miscellaneous antiquities, for which there was, likewise, no room in the Museum. By great good fortune both collections came into the Museum's possession shortly after a new Principal Librarian had been appointed, in the person of Joseph Planta (1744-1827).

All this, though incidental to Gray's activities in the Museum, was to throw further light on the condition of the natural history collections under his charge. With the Trustees petitioning Parliament for funds for the purchase of the Townley Collection, as well as for a new building for it and for the Egyptian antiquities, it devolved upon the Principal Librarian to take stock of conditions within Montagu House as a whole, and to question their adequacy to a growing public demand. The question of a new building was resolved in a report by a House of Commons Committee of 19 June 1805²³ which was accepted by the Trustees, and a new Townley Gallery was erected at the north-west corner of Montagu House, to be opened on 3 June 1808. The internal affairs of the Museum, on the other hand, were investigated by a number of committees, the first dealing with the conditions of the departments under the cloak of

... Manuals for the Attendants and what is wanted to be done in each department of the Museum²⁴

The paragraphs concerning the Department of Natural and Artificial Products revealed deficiencies which a Solander would not have allowed to pass, and it may be significant that the reports Gray was required to submit were to be countersigned by Joseph Planta himself :

1. That inscriptions be placed in the different rooms according to the list specified by Dr Gray (Appendix F) [not now available].
2. That Mr Planta and Dr Gray report on the General Catalogue or Inventory which may best serve the purposes of the Annual Visitation.
3. That measures be immediately taken for more effectively excluding the dust from those parts of the Collection under Dr Gray's care, and that the progress made therein be reported at the next General Meeting.

Gray's reply, dated December 1805, to what were in fact criticisms of his stewardship, was unquestionably evasive, and being in no position to make it otherwise, he tendered his resignation of the office of Secretary before the Trustees met in early 1806.²⁵ Although he retained the Keepership for another year until his death,²⁶ his name disappears from the Minutes ; and death did not spare his reputation.

²³ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1805, GM.981.

The Trustees Minutes of 3 July 1805 title this report wrongly, and it is therefore misleading. It will be found under House of Commons Reports of Commons Committees, 1805, III, pp. 347-355, 19 June 1805, and was received by the Trustees on 3 July 1805.

²⁴ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1805, GM.978-981.

²⁵ BM. Trustees Minutes 1806, GM.985.

²⁶ BM. Trustees Minutes 1805, C.2267.

During 1806 a Sub-committee of the Trustees had been considering the Establishment and Duties of the Officers, its report being finally approved at an Extraordinary General Meeting of 28 February 1807.²⁷ The most important of its conclusions, as far as they related to natural history, was that antiquities should no longer be subordinate in a Department of Natural and Artificial Products. Indeed, in 1803 an Assistant Librarian had already been placed in charge of antiquities in the person of Taylor Combe (1774-1826)²⁸ and the formal separation was made on the occasion of Gray's death, leaving George Shaw as Keeper of the Natural History Collections.

More relevant to the near twenty years of Gray's Keepership are the following paragraphs in the Sub-committee's report :

*Departments of the Museum*²⁹

4. In the Department of Natural History all the Catalogues are represented to be so defective, that the under-Librarian here will have a choice of labour in which he must be directed (under the sanction of the Trustees and of the Principal Librarian) by the joint consideration of his own peculiar qualifications, and the urgency of the particular work.

*List of Works to be executed either in the discharge of the ordinary Duties of the House, or as Extra Services*³⁰

3. Natural History
 1. General Inventory of the Contents of the Department for purposes of the Annual Visitation.
 2. New Catalogue of Sir Hans Sloane Collection, the original catalogue of 20 volumes is very inaccurate.
 3. Catalogue of Insects, Zoophytes, Lithophytes . . . it is doubtful if some parts of the collection deserve a catalogue.
 4. To arrange the general mass of the Botanical Collection postponed by previous Officers.
 5. To compile a Classed Catalogue of all the printed Books in the Museum belonging to subjects of Natural History according to the plan of Sir Joseph Banks but in a more compressed form.

The change of temper under Joseph Planta's librarianship becomes clear from the duty imposed on officers in carrying out these directions. Thus every Under Librarian and Assistant Librarian was obliged, in his first year, to devote the whole of his extra time (namely, three mornings in each week) without extra allowance, to the service of the Museum. For the public, one of the first tangible results of this was the issue, in 1808, of the *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum*, to run through sixty-three editions, the last in 1856.³¹

²⁷ BM. Trustees Minutes 1807, GM.1007 *et seq.*

²⁸ *Dict. natn. biogr.*, 1887, II : 429 (Combe, Taylor, written by W. Worth). In 1808 Taylor Combe married Gray's second daughter, Elizabeth.

²⁹ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1807, GM.1011.

³⁰ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1807, GM.1013.

³¹ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1807, GM.1031, 1038. See also Anon., 1808 *et seq.*

ROYAL SOCIETY AND LATER YEARS

Throughout the years of his attachment to the British Museum Gray was active in the affairs of the Royal Society, and his participation, both as a Fellow and later as Secretary, gives a further insight into the place he took among his contemporaries. His election is dated 11 February 1779, about a year after his return from Portugal. In his application, Gray had simply described himself as 'Botanist', since an M.D., unless supported by some noteworthy advance in surgery or medicine, was insufficient grounds for election. It is difficult in an age of patronage to appraise the calibre of men who held positions, since many were elected to the Society through the influence of their friends. Gray, for example, had the support of eleven Fellows, among them Sir Joseph Banks, Daniel Solander, Charles Morton, later Principal Librarian, and Sir William Watson, one of the Trustees.³²

Coming from a family long connected with commercial botany, and being himself interested in plants, Gray would naturally lean on the subject to justify an application. Yet Gray's formal contact with botany is conspicuous, if not by its absence, by such meagre reference in the literature as that in Vol. XXIII of Sowerby's *English Botany*, where its author, J. E. Smith,

... begs leave to mention that my worthy friend Dr Gray of the British Museum has very properly reminded me of his having, many years ago, shown me specimens of *S. murale*, which at page 1090 of this work, is mentioned as a more recent discovery. *Irio sisymbrium* - [London rocket.]

Another isolated record of Gray's field activities in botany comes from his having, in 1777, sent Sir Joseph Banks a collection of plants from Portugal. However, with Solander in charge at Montagu House and working on Banks' collections in Soho Square, the latter would hardly have cause to recommend another botanist to the Museum.

To be an Assistant Librarian at the British Museum was a sufficient qualification for election to the Linnean Society in 1788 for one of its first associates, no botanical interest or achievements being called for. It is significant, however, that throughout all the years of his fellowship, Gray contributed nothing to the Society's proceedings.³³ It was left to the author in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, writing some eighty years after Gray's death, to record that he was '... stated to have been eminent as a botanist', and Munk accords him the distinction of '... well known philosopher and naturalist' (Munk, 1878: 298).

Gray's first contributions to the Royal Society, six years after his election, were the Croonian Lectures³⁴ of 1785 and 1786, which, by the testator's will, were on

³² Gray's Certificate of Election shows him to have been supported by:

* Banks, Sir Joseph (1743-1820), President of the Royal Society from 1778; Harper, Samuel; * Wilson, Benjamin (1721-1788), painter and man of science; * Watson, Sir William (1715-1787), M.D., Trustee of the B.M.; * Solander, Daniel Charles (1736-1782), M.D.; * Duane, Matthew (1707-1785), F.S.A., coin collector; Majendie, John James, later D.D.; Lloyd, John; Shadwell, Lancelot; Greville, Charles Francis (1749-1809), botanist, mineralogist; * Morton Charles (1716-1799), Principal Librarian.

* Thus, six were eminent enough to qualify for the *Dictionary of National Biography* and Charles Greville, whose garden and conservatory at Paddington Green would have been well known to the Gray family, is recorded in *Bretschneider* and in *Rees' Cyclopaedia*, xvii, under *Grevillea*.

³³ Linnean Society, 1789, *List of Linnean Society, 1788-1851*.

³⁴ *Dict. nat. biogr.*, 1888, 13: 207 (Croone, William, written by Thompson Cooper).

muscular response (Gray, E. W., 1785, 1786). He was ten years a Fellow of the Society before his first paper appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions* (Gray, E. W., 1788), and this, strange as it may seem, was on 'electric fluid', and the manner in which glass is charged and discharged. It was a paper of four pages, an unusual subject for a naturalist to turn to, and may be described as a philosophical reflection unsupported, it seems, by practical experiments; it could well have been the product of a visit to a laboratory of one of his friends known for his interest in natural philosophy. The next year there appeared, also in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Gray's only known published contribution to natural history; it was an *Observations on the Class of Animals called by Linnaeus, Amphibia; particularly on the Means of distinguishing those Serpents which are venomous, and those which are not so* (Gray, E. W., 1789). Gray was critical of the work Linnaeus had done, supposedly in a hurry, and sought to reverse Linnaeus' conclusion that venomous serpents could not be separated, by proposing, on the basis of external physical characters, that they could be, and should be made generically distinct. Then, in 1795, Gray was requested by the President to collect facts about a considerable earthquake occurring on the night of 18 November of that year, in an area bounded by Bristol, Liverpool, Leeds and Norwich, and to determine its cause (Gray, E. W., 1796). In balancing the evidence, terrestrial and aerial, Gray in a well-reasoned paper, 'felt disposed to believe their cause is situated in the earth', the atmospheric causes being accidental or secondary. Each of these papers gives an uncomplicated, straightforward account of the factors involved, and analyses the problems in a way a reader can accept. At least they associate their author with the names of the eminent men which appear in the *Transactions* in these years; Banks, Cavendish, Erasmus Darwin, William Herschel, Everard Home, John Hunter, Nevil Maskelyne, Priestley and James Edward Smith.

In 1797, at the age of 49, Gray was elected the Royal Society's Senior Secretary, and it is interesting to examine the circumstances which brought him into so prominent a position. In 1782, three years after his election as Fellow, there occurred one of those rows that, from time to time, tend to rend a society, particularly when a strong personality, such as Sir Joseph Banks its President, finds his authority ignored by its officers.³⁵ Although Gray was in no way involved in the dispute, its consequences led to his preferment. After Sir Joseph Banks had been President for two years, the foreign secretary, Dr Charles Hutton (1737-1823), Professor of Mathematics at Woolwich Academy and living at Woolwich, was charged with usurping the President's functions and neglecting his duties. Banks secured Hutton's removal by persuading the Council to make the rule that the Society's secretaries must reside in London. Sir Joseph's action threatened the Society with a schism, and in the ensuing controversy the Senior Secretary, the Rev. Paul Henry Maty, showing himself as contrary in the affairs of the Society as he had in the affairs of the Church, resigned the secretaryship on the grounds of Sir Joseph's 'despotism'. Peace was eventually restored by the appointment as Secretary of Banks' friend, Sir Charles Blagden (1748-1820), whose scientific

³⁵ *Dict. natn. biogr.*, 1885, 3: 129 (Banks, Sir Joseph, written by B. D. Jackson).

reputation and personal quality restored confidence. In 1797, after thirteen years in office, Blagden retired and it is a tribute to Gray's relations both with the Fellows and with an increasingly authoritarian President, that on 30 November of that year he was elected as Senior Secretary.³⁶ One may conclude, therefore, that if judged by the nature of his contributions to the Society's Proceedings Gray owed it to his personal qualities rather than to any intellectual distinction that he found himself, twenty years after his arrival in London, as Senior Secretary of the Royal Society, a position that he held until his death, when he was succeeded by Sir Humphry Davy (Anon., 1940).

Ever since Gray's appointment as Keeper at the British Museum he had, as was customary, occupied apartments within Montagu House and he kept these until his death. It is probable that his wife lived in the family home at Blackheath where his son, Francis Edward Gray (1784-1814),³⁷ was born, brought up and lived after his marriage. By 1800, Gray appears to have overcome his objections to the marriage of his nephew Samuel Frederick, and as he may often have been alone in the Museum's apartments, he encouraged Samuel to bring his young family back to London and to settle in Devonshire Street, Queen's Square (now Burton Street, w.c.1), ten minutes' walk from the Museum (Gunther, 1975 : 61). The old man took an unexpected liking to Samuel's wife, Elizabeth Forfeit, being grieved unless he saw her every day (Gray, J. E., *c.* 1862 : f. 5), itself a sign that he was ageing ; a fact the Trustees Minutes confirm in the loss of health.³⁸

About this time, Gray sat for his portrait, as a gentleman of his position and estate should rightly do, choosing a promising young society painter, August Wall Callcott (1779-1844), a pupil of John Hoppner's (1758-1810). The portrait, (Plate 1) is in the Reynolds genre, the fashion of the time, and it suggests a sitter younger than Gray can have been (he was in fact over fifty). The features, with the high forehead characteristic of the Gray family, convey the distinction of a grand seigneur, but they also betray a want of sympathy, even of assertiveness, and are certainly without the severe intellectualism of his nephew, Samuel Frederick, or the human spontaneity of his great-nephew, John Edward, so evident in his active, middle years.

The last honour to come to the old gentleman – if fifty-five, even in those days can be called old – was election as one of the Trustees to the museum founded for the collection of John Hunter who had died in 1793. After ten years of government indecision, the collection was eventually purchased in 1799 and delivered over to the Court of Assistants of the Surgeons Company under certain terms and conditions which included the appointment of Trustees by Office and Election (Anon., 1803). It was as one of the fourteen eminent men elected as 'Trustees by Original Appointment' that Gray found himself associated with the prominent in the land, from the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker downwards, although it is recorded that he

³⁶ The only letters exchanged between Banks, as President of the Royal Society and Gray as Secretary, to be preserved are two of 3 and 21 September 1802 which discuss whether the Croonian Lecturer need be a Fellow of the Society (see BM. MS. 3).

³⁷ Francis Edward Gray, m. Maria Emma Smith, who, twelve years after her husband's death, married John Edward Gray.

³⁸ BM. Trustees Minutes, 1804, C.2247.

attended one meeting only before his death (Negus, 1966 : 8). Gray was further honoured by the Board of Trustees, who recommended presenting him with a cast of the bust of John Hunter, copies being received also by Sir Joseph Banks, Sir Charles Blagden, George Shaw and Joseph Planta (Anon., 1822).

Gray died in the Keeper's Apartments at the British Museum on 28 December 1806, and according to the family Bible was 'buried behind the Foundling opposite to Askew's grave'.³⁹ Gray's burial is recorded in the burial register of St George Church, Bloomsbury Way (sometime called Hart Street) :

1807, January 3rd, Edward Whitaker Gray, M.D., British Museum.⁴⁰

His name also appears in the burial fees book, with one item paid to the gravedigger (P82/Geo. 1/69). There is, however, no link between this record and the location of the burial ground unless that in the family Bible is accepted. If it is, and being repeated for two others of the family, there is little doubt of its correctness, then Gray would have been buried in the so-called, 'Burial Ground of St George, Bloomsbury', a narrow east-west strip which lay north of a parallel strip being the 'Burial Ground of St George the Martyr'. Both these strips of land were situated 'behind the Foundling' (namely, north of the Foundling Hospital of 1739-1926) which were, in 1884, combined into the St George Gardens of the present Camden Council.

The family Bible is, however, in error about Askew's grave, that is, if it refers to Dr Anthony Askew, M.D., F.R.S. (1722-1774), eminent as a Greek scholar and 'friend of all learning' who lived in Queen Square, Bloomsbury. Askew died at Hampstead, the family home, and according to the Burial Register of St John's Church, Hampstead, was buried there on 6 March 1774, as correctly recorded by Munk (1878 : 188). It might well be that those who saw much of Gray's life spent in the shadow of great men thought to associate him in death with the eminent President of Royal College of Physicians, who had authorized his first employment in 1773.

Time has largely worn away the inscriptions on the tombstones that graced the 'Burial Ground of St George, Bloomsbury', and such as remain have been placed against the periphery walls, Gray's probably amongst them (Gordon & Deeson, 1950 : 116). In 1793 Gray's fourth child, William Herman (ob. inf.), was laid to rest 'behind the Foundling' where his father was to follow him, and in 1826, Taylor Combe (1774-1826), Gray's son-in-law, joined them.

In spite of the positions he held, and the attributions a later generation bestowed upon him, Edward Whitaker Gray may be seen rather as a man of general capability, acceptable to those to whom he owed his advancement rather than as one of the more prominent men of his day. In spite of the opportunities that came his way, it seems that the creative intellect, which made its appearance in the Gray family over many generations, passed him by. Possibly an up-bringing as a late arrival and the absence of any need to earn a living removed incentive from his character. But if the course of his life lacked the element of concentration (he did not stay in medicine

³⁹ Gray Family Bible of 1821, in possession of Samuel Walter Gray (1941-).

⁴⁰ Greater London Record Office, The County Hall, Head Archivist, London S.E.1. P.82/Geo. 1/57 and 1/69.

longer than he wanted), and he evidently saw in natural history an occupation suited to a gentleman of his inclinations, the fact remains that he devoted his life and means to the cause of science and, whether as medical man, museum curator or as secretary of a scientific society, he lent his presence to a background of considerable events. He lived and worked on the fringe of the activities of some of the great scientists of the period, but he lacked the capacity to contribute to the progress they themselves inspired.

INFLUENCE ON J. E. GRAY

In considering the life of Edward Whitaker Gray one turns, inevitably, to the greater achievement of his great-nephew, John Edward Gray. One could even go further and say that the interest in the uncle stems from the greater interest in the nephew (as well, incidentally, as in his father, Samuel Frederick Gray). Unless this were the case the record of Edward Whitaker Gray's life might have remained buried in the volumes of the Minutes of the Trustees of the British Museum, since Gray's impress on the scientific mind of his day is suggested in the brief, three-line note of his death in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Anon., 1807). In concluding an account of Gray's life, therefore, it is relevant to assess the nature of his influence on his great-nephew, and to enquire what the latter really knew about his uncle's career.

Most of John Edward Gray's impressions must have come from his father, but there were others in the Museum who will have remembered his uncle, like John Abernethy of St Bartholomew's, and there may have been personal and family documents that have since been lost. However, it is certain that he would not have had the broad and accurate knowledge of his uncle's contemporaries such as we have (there is evidence of that in his *Autobiography*). It is doubtful if he had access to official sources such as those of the Minutes of the Trustees of the British Museum or those of the Royal Society. Nor were the encyclopaedias of the period, good as they were, any match for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which provides a remarkable perspective to history. Nevertheless, it is rather surprising, when one considers the importance John Edward himself attached to publishing scientific work, that he did not remark, in his habitual references to his uncle in the *Autobiography*, on the meagreness of the latter's contributions to natural history, and the lack of a catalogue of the collections of which he had charge. Neither did he ever suggest that his uncle had not a tithe of his own father's learning, originality, scholarship or perception.

It is more likely that his uncle's influence grew out of what he was told as a child, rather than from the recollection at the age of four of a visit to Montagu House and the stuffed crocodile across the back staircase (Gray, J. E., c. 1862 : f. 6). His parents presumably kept telling him, as parents do, that unless he worked hard he would never, like his uncle, become a great man, and certainly not Keeper of the natural history collections.

It was my day-dream when a lad that I should like to be like my great uncle the keeper of the Natural History department in the British Museum, most

improbable considering the circumstances of my father and myself caused by his continued ill-health. (Gray, J. E., *c.* 1862-74 : f. 19)

The personal relations between John Edward Gray's father and uncle must also have had a bearing on John's opinion, but there is nothing to suggest that the ill-feeling about the father's marriage carried through into the uncle's later years. The return of the Gray family to London in 1800 to settle near the British Museum may have been due to the uncle's charity, but there is nothing to suggest that it improved the family situation during the Chelsea years after 1806. If Samuel Frederick knew more about his uncle than the aura surrounding an official in the British Museum and a secretary of the Royal Society, any talk of 'success', in terms of scientific accomplishment, would have had a hollow ring in the ears of a man of his intellect and discernment. Not only had Samuel Frederick suffered loss of patrimony under his grandfather's will (Gunther, 1975 : 31), but by worldly standards he exhibited all the ingredients of failure, as an intellectual of his temperament would have been the first to admit, and his son to realize.

In his writing there is nothing to suggest that John Edward Gray inherited any ill-feeling towards his great-uncle ; on the contrary, he had reason to be grateful for a happy accident that provided him with a wife. Edward Whitaker's son, Francis Edward Gray, died prematurely in 1814, leaving a widow and two daughters. John Edward Gray married the widow, Maria Emma, twelve years later, and thereby acquired not only happiness but the means to live his life fully. It put travel within his reach, and his first visit to Europe in 1826 was to Paris to study at the feet of the Baron Cuvier, whom he had conducted round London as a student of 18, and who he revered as colouring his whole approach to zoology. Although free with his criticism of Cuvier's work, it was from Cuvier that Gray derived the inspiration of his universal concept in his *Systema naturae*. To follow in the steps of the master was an ideal to provide the driving force for an extraordinary range of published work, to include 200 catalogues and 1000 separate papers in fifty years' service in the British Museum.

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